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CIA Seeks to Improve Image

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When a visitor approaches the headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency in Langley, Virginia, he or she is struck because government spies do have a headquarters building and the location of the compound is no longer an ill-kept secret. The mere fact that visitors are allowed inside the area, which is surrounded by a fence and a quaint forest, is a remarkable change of policy instituted only a few years ago.

Since the revelation of many illegal and unpopular CIA activities, the relationship of that government organization to the public has blossomed from one of frequent "no comments" to at least an opening of some of the doors and windows. The CIA is now willing to explain much of what it does, to explain why it does not explain some of what it does, and to explain that spying is only part of what it does.

Stansfield Turner, Director of Central Intelligence, is a former Navy Admiral who was brought to the CIA last year by President Carter, as a replacement for former CIA head George Bush. Turner is an obvious product of the Navy, whose tough manner is evident in every aspect from his speech to his handling of what he terms "whistle blowers": those agents who have written exposes of their CIA experiences in defiance of their pledge to have such information declassified before it is published.

His voice is tense when he speaks of Frank Snepp, a former agent whose recent book has resulted in a suit by the Attorney

General, challenging the legality of breaking the secrecy agreement. Snepp "looked me right in the eye," said Turner, and promised to have the information in his book cleared by the CIA. He did not keep that promise, Turner observed.

Such persons as Snepp should "blow the whistle" in the appropriate manner, by addressing the Intelligence Oversight Board, which investigates the matter in question and then reports to the president. Otherwise, agents are breaking their word and are damaging the CIA by revealing classified information, according to Turner.

Part of the difficulty with classified information, he continued, is that the CIA has accumulated so much of it, "we don't respect it."

Turner has defended maintaining a contractual arrangement with journalists of foreign publications. American journalists should not have such contracts with the CIA, he noted, since that type of relationship would undermine the principles of a free press.

But if the CIA is able to influence the media of countries not friendly with the United States, the agency would benefit, he said. "If I can get the editor of Pravda (a Soviet newspaper) on my payroll, I'm delighted." Since the Soviet Union does not encourage a free press, Turner sees no wrong in attempting to influence its dissemination of information.

In addition to bringing to the CIA a tough attitude on many issues, Turner has imported its first professional public relations officer. Herb Hetu, Director of Public Affairs for the

CIA, noted the "retroactive morality" which has caused the agency to modify its activities and viewpoints because of changing public standards.

Both Hetu and Turner mentioned the CIA's engagement in five major changes in the operation of the agency. The primary change, Hetu noted, is in the type of information which the CIA gathers.

"We've changed our product. What we're interested in," he said. The agency used to be almost exclusively concerned with the Soviet Union. Today, the "Soviets are our number one target — intelligence target," said Hetu, but effort is also spent on collecting political and economic data from all countries.

The CIA is also involved in anti-terrorist and anti-narcotic activities abroad, Hetu explained, but little of such information is revealed in order to keep the operations functioning. The "two things which we protect at all costs are our sources and methods," he said, whether the activity is directly related to spying or not.

A second area of change is the means by which the CIA obtains its information. There is more dependence on watching and reading the foreign news media, and on scientific observation of economies and politics, than in former days. Nonetheless, spies are still an integral part of the CIA's operation, said Hetu, noting, "you still need a spy" to talk to people or for "stealing documents."

Hetu also stressed the college background of CIA employees, the third major change, with the number of individuals with graduate and post-graduate degrees increasing. Among the results of this grouping of intellectuals is a wider variety of information which the CIA can study.

Significant development of

congressional oversight has put the CIA in a more public position. Permanent intelligence committees in the Senate and the House of Representatives insure that the CIA acts "legally, ethically, and properly." Observation by Congress and by the Intelligence Oversight Board are the direct result of the revelation of illegal CIA activities during the past 25 years, according to Hetu, and both he and Turner agreed that such a change has been beneficial.

The final change is "more public openness." Hetu remarked that information about the CIA is readily supplied to the news media and to interested individuals, within the agency's self-imposed limits. Much of the information from the CIA is obtained from requests under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). "I think it's a good act," said Hetu, but it makes no provisions for how a government agency is to obtain the funds and the staff necessary for examining the FOIA requests.

The Flat Hat is currently making such a request to determine the extent of CIA recruitment activities at William and Mary during the early 1970s. The CIA has engaged in recruiting at college campuses for years, but lately has not had to search vigorously for prospective employees. During the past year, Hetu noted, there were over 37,000 "serious inquiries for 1100 positions."

Although recruitment has declined, Turner stated that the CIA has sought to increase its visibility on college campuses. One spokesperson for the agency characterized the CIA's activities as "studied analysis of things, not spying." Sending such a message to colleges has pleased Turner. "The contact, I really do believe, is mutually reinforcing."